

Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics: To Teach or Not To Teach?

Vocabulary comprehension is found in reading standards and activities, but correct spelling and usage of a word is usually related to writing standards. Students who learn the rules of word use including spelling, part of speech and function of a word, will be better equipped to determine the meaning of unknown words or words used in unusual or uncommon ways. Developing vocabulary *strategies* is a critical skill and is closely tied to grammar instruction.

Resources:

Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction by Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown, and Linda Kucan. A popular resource for helping teachers understand the types of instructional experiences that deepen students understanding of words and their relationships to other words.

Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction by Donald R. Bear, Marcia Invernizzi, Shane Templeton, and Francine Johnston
Articulating 5 stages of development in spelling, with stage 5 spellers found in middle school, high school, and college, this text provides a wealth of information for active exploration of words revealing regularities, patterns, and conventions in how words are spelled.

The Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar has a great website:
<http://www.ateg.org/> Here you will find some great links to resources as well as philosophical discussions about teaching grammar.

From *Education World*, some online sources for teaching students about words.
http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr149.shtml

A great resource with many activities, graphic organizers, and models for teaching **vocabulary** is found at <http://www.literacyforme.org/Element5.html>. Be sure to scroll down to the links at the bottom of the page.

Writing Next suggests that one of the most effective methods of teaching grammar, usage, and mechanics is to practice sentence combining. You can find sentence combining information and exercises at the following:

<http://grammar.about.com/od/tests/a/introsc.htm>

http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/combining_skills.htm

While you can find plenty of sentence combining exercises, the goal is to have students identify sentences in their own writing and combine sentences which are clear, concise, and accurate. Identifying sentences to combine can also be a great task for a peer editor.

Peer edit. Students need to develop independence with proofreading and providing feedback. Here is a resource I have used with great success to help develop independent

and meaningful feedback and revision skills. Feel free to revise at will.

<http://www.state.me.us/education/lres/ela/peereditprotocol.doc>

Using a handbook. It seems that the most popular writing handbook is *The Writer's Reference* by Diane Hacker. When students do a peer editing activity, have them look up the accuracy of their suggestions in a handbook.

Activities:

Try this: after exploring some of the fun facts about words in one of these links, have students write brief responses (try single paragraphs) which exploit (perhaps exaggerate would be the better word) a particular aspect of language. Ground the topic in what you are currently reading and have students write:

- A paragraph that includes only sentences which are subordinated (or y coordinated or have a gerund or have an appositive, etc.).
- A scene which uses certain words from a class vocabulary list. Emphasize unique sentences as part of the exercise.
- A summary of a poem, short story, chapter, or article read by the class and which includes at least two semi-colons.